

# A Survey of Women Inmates in Utah

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Utah Commission  
on Criminal and  
Juvenile Justice

# Introduction

Female inmates constitute one of the fastest growing segments of the inmate population. In addition, the rate of recidivism among women offenders has been rising sharply in recent decades. Yet we rarely see theoretical attention focused on the unique characteristics of women that are incarcerated. Female offenders have needs that can differ greatly from those of male offenders. However, there is relatively little gender-specific programming available to meet the needs of women in the criminal justice system. Many female offenders are also responsible for young children. An often overlooked issue is the welfare of these children left behind by their incarcerated mothers.

This survey and report are the result of a request by the Substance Abuse Administration at the Utah State Prison. Clearly, there is a need to understand the special circumstances of women inmates. The data collected here is intended to provide information regarding the characteristics of female prisoners in Utah, and the issues particular to their confinement. First, let us briefly review the national profile of women inmates.

## National Profile

The female prisoner population has more than doubled since 1990, from 44,065 to 94,336 in 2001 (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2002). In 2000, 22% of all arrests were of women (BJS, 2000). In addition, women's imprisonment for drug related offenses specifically has substantially increased. The Bureau of Justice Statistics (2000) reported that 1 in 3 women were incarcerated on a drug offense in 2000. Also, about one-half of women offenders in state prisons had used alcohol, drugs, or both at the time of their offense (BJS, 2000).

Looking at family characteristics and background information among incarcerated women, the Bureau of Justice Statistics published the following information in a report in 2000

(<http://curry.edschool.virginia.edu/prisonstudy/subpages/facts/facts.html>):

- Incarcerated women are twice as likely as women in the general population to have grown up in a single parent household.
- 47% of female inmates (compared to 37% of male inmates) had at least one immediate family member who had been incarcerated.
- One-third of female inmates and one-quarter of male inmates report a parent/guardian abused alcohol or drugs.
- 57% of women in state prisons reported that they were physically and/or sexually assaulted at some point in their lives.

- Over one-third of imprisoned women had been abused by an intimate in the past.
- Female inmates who had been abuse victims were more likely to be imprisoned on a violent offense.
- Most women in prison are unmarried.
- About 70% of women in local jails, 65% of women in state prisons, and 59% of women in federal prisons have young children.
- Women under supervision by justice agencies are mothers of an estimated 1.3 million minor children.
- About 3.5% of women prisoners were diagnosed as HIV positive in 1997, compared to 2.2% of men.

## **Background**

### **Methodology**

Utah Department of Corrections (UDC) staff administered an earlier version of the survey instrument used here, prior to the administration of this survey. The instrument was then revised and expanded by staff members of the Utah Commission on Criminal and Juvenile Justice (CCJJ). Questions were added to extract more information from survey respondents regarding past crimes committed against them, their relationships to the offenders, and reporting information. More detailed questions were also included concerning substance use, demographic characteristics, as well as treatment history for substance abuse and mental health.

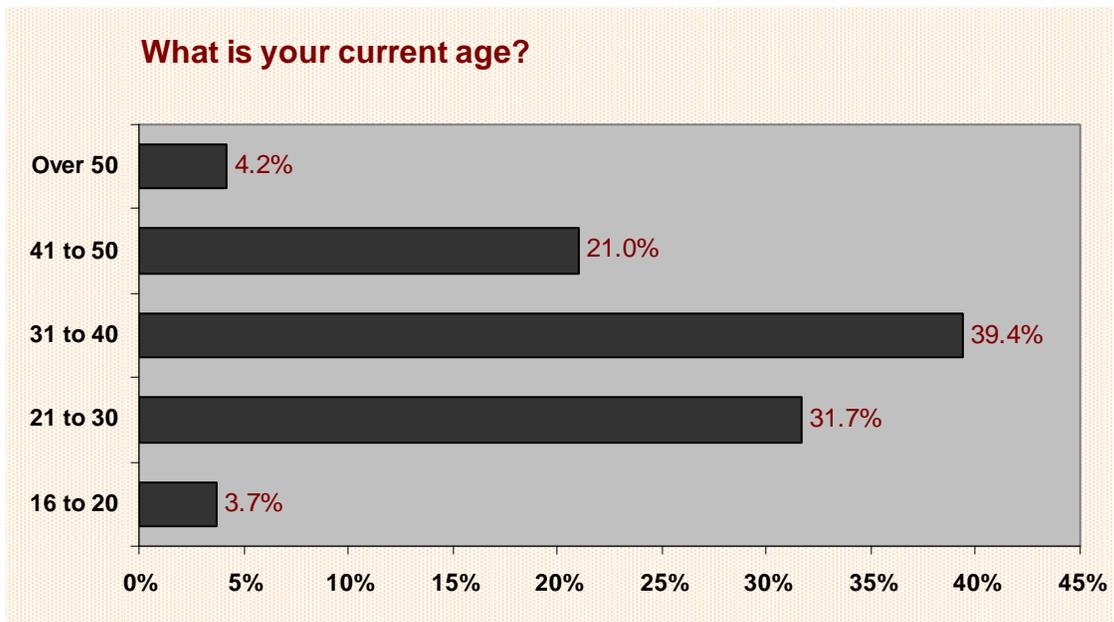
The revised survey was administered to approximately 150 female inmates housed at the Timpanogos facility at the Utah State Prison by UDC staff, along with one CCJJ staff member. Around 150 additional surveys were administered by UDC staff alone, to inmates that were located in higher security areas. Surveys were also mailed out to all of the jails in Utah that were housing female offenders at that time. Included with the surveys was a cover sheet explaining the purpose of the survey, and instructions for administering the survey. There was no identifying information placed on the surveys, and all of the respondents were assured that their responses would remain anonymous. Approximately 70 completed surveys were returned from the jails, and 288 from inmates at the Utah State Prison, for a total sample size of 358.

The survey instrument consisted of 62 closed-ended questions. Themes covered by the survey included demographics, health, substance use, treatment history, family history, children, and history of physical and sexual abuse. Descriptive statistics are reported in the following section.

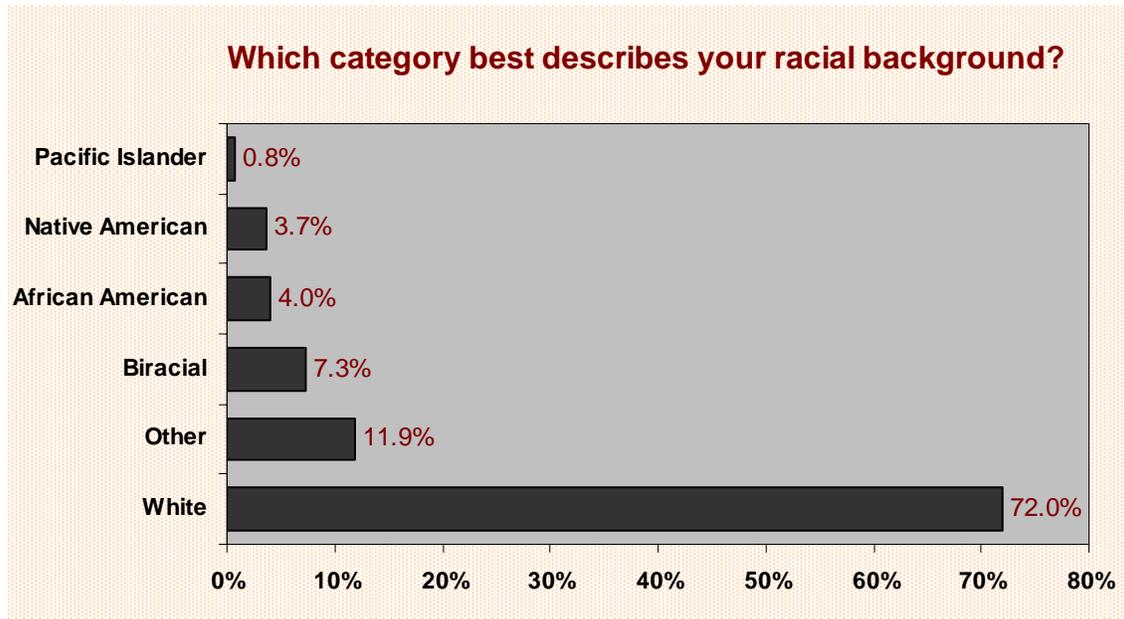
# Results

## Demographic Characteristics

Respondents' age broke out as follows: 16 - 17 (0.6%); 18 - 20 (3.1%); 21 - 25 (15.7%); 26 - 30 (16.0%); 31 - 35 (19.0%); 36 - 40 (20.4%); 41 - 45 (12.9%); 46 - 50 (8.1%); Over 50 (4.2%). Thus, more than half of the offenders were between the ages of 26 and 40. The survey responses regarding age have been collapsed into broader categories in the chart below for easier viewing.



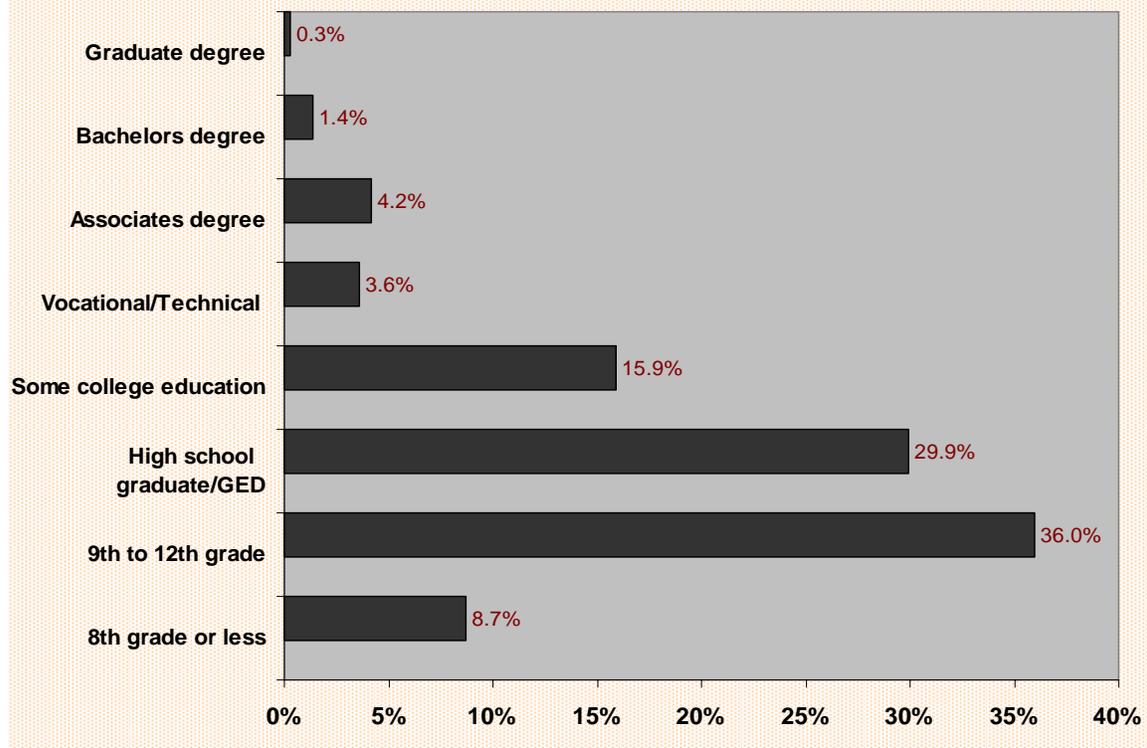
Looking at race, 72.0% of respondents were white, 7.3% bi/multi-racial, 4.0% black, 3.7% Native American, 0.8% Pacific Islander, 0.3% Asian, and 11.9% some other race. Further, 21.6% of the offenders were of Hispanic origin, while 78.4% were non-Hispanic. Overall, 37.4% of the respondents were minorities. The chart on the following page details the racial composition of survey respondents.



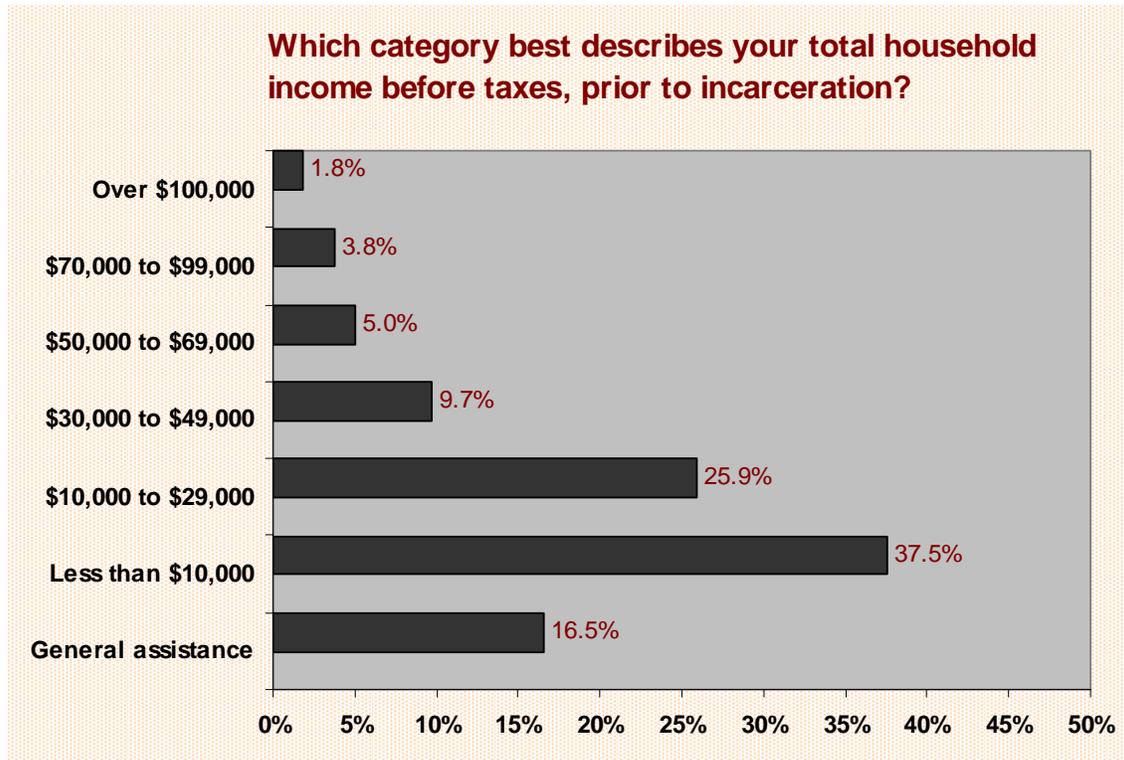
Six times as many of those surveyed reported having Hepatitis (18.6%), than HIV (3.1%). Even more respondents (23.9%) had a sexually transmitted disease, other than Hepatitis or HIV.

Reviewing the educational attainment of respondents prior to incarceration, nearly half of respondents did not complete high school requirements (44.7%). A small number of respondents had some post-high school education, 3.6% with vocational training, 4.2% with an associate's degree, 1.4% with a bachelor's degree, and 0.3% with a graduate degree of some sort. Survey respondents were also questioned regarding their level of education achieved while incarcerated. For instance, 6.1% of inmates that previously had only a high school level of education, reported having some level of college education after being incarcerated. Two percent (1.7%) of inmates earned associate's degrees while incarcerated, and 2.3% received some vocational or technical training. The chart on the following page illustrates the highest level of education achieved by survey respondents, prior to their incarceration.

### What was your highest level of education achieved prior to incarceration?



A majority of respondents (54.0%) reported a total household income of under \$10,000 prior to being incarcerated, as shown in the chart on the following page. Twenty-six percent (25.9%) were making between \$10,000 and \$29,000, and 14.7% were making between \$30,000 and \$69,000. Less than five percent of respondents (3.8%) were making between \$70,000 and \$99,000. Only 6 inmates (1.8%) had an income over \$100,000 at the time of their incarceration. About two-thirds of respondents (64.7%) felt they had a trade or job skills that would allow them to obtain employment at a higher than minimum wage level.



Looking at employment status prior to incarceration, 40.2% were employed full-time, 13.3% part-time, and 28.6% were unemployed. The remaining 17.9% were students, homemakers, or retirees.

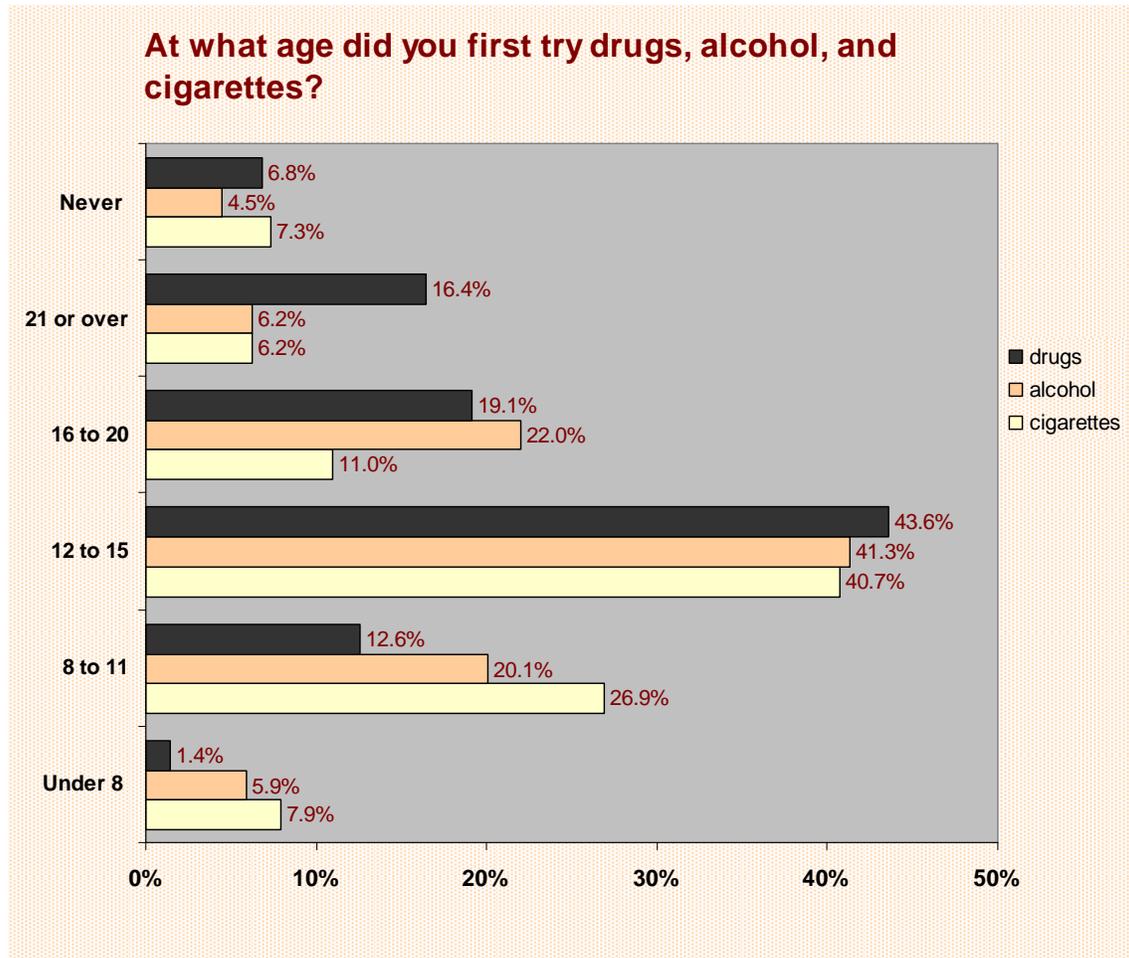
When asked what religion they belong to, 41.1% of respondents noted they were LDS, 17.5% Catholic, 17.2% Non-denominational Christian, and 7.9% Baptist. Nine percent (8.7%) said they belonged to none, and 7.6% were of another religion not listed above. More respondents attend religious services while incarcerated (72.7%), than while not incarcerated (54.6%).

A majority of survey respondents were living in Salt Lake (41.5%) or Ogden (26.0%) at the time of their arrest. Sixteen percent (16.2%) reported living in Provo, Bountiful, Price, St. George, Logan, or Brigham City. Two respondents (0.6%) were living in Nevada when arrested, and 15.8% responded as living somewhere other than one of the areas listed above.

## Substance Use

Sixty-three percent (62.5%) of the women surveyed are incarcerated for a drug related crime, while 77.6% say their crime was committed while under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Half of all respondents (50.6%) said they

committed their crime in order to obtain money for drugs. When asked if they had ever traded sex for either money or drugs, 27.4% responded affirmatively.



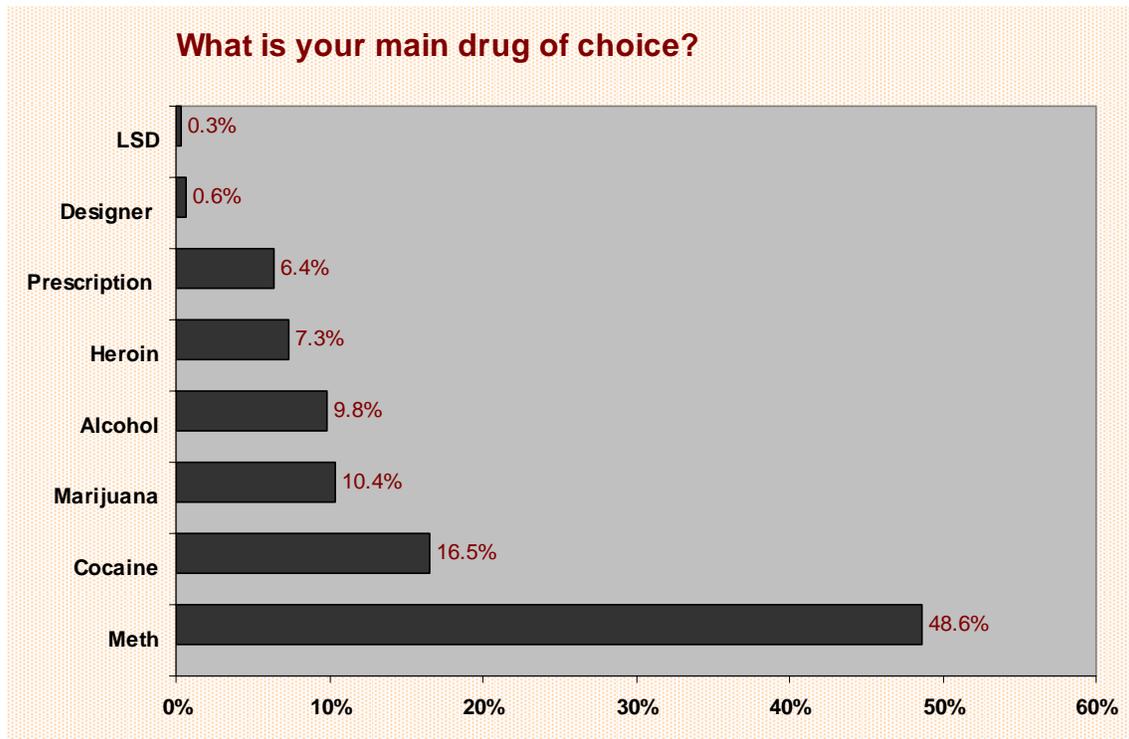
The chart above shows the age at which survey respondents reported first experimenting with drugs, alcohol, and cigarettes. The age categories have been collapsed somewhat for easier viewing. The highest percentage of respondents (22.9%) first tried cigarettes at age 12 or 13, and only 7.3% reported never trying cigarettes. Eight percent (7.9%) were under 8, 26.9% were 8 - 11, 24.6% were 14 - 17, 7.9% were 18 – 25, and 2.5% were 26 or over. Seven percent (7.1%) had smoked for 0 – 2 years, 21.2% for 3 – 9 years, and 61.1% for 10 or more years.

Interestingly, the highest percentage of respondents (22.9%) also noted first trying alcohol at age 12 or 13. Six percent of respondents (5.9%) were under 8 when they first tried alcohol, 20.1% were 8 – 11, 34.2% were 14 – 17,

10.7% were 18 – 25, and 1.7% 26 or over. Only 4.5% said they have never tried alcohol.

Again, the highest percentage of respondents (23.9%) first tried drugs at age 12 or 13. Thirteen percent (12.6%) had their first experience with drugs when they were 8 – 11, 33.2% were 14 – 17, 13.8% were 18 – 25, 8.2% were 26 or over, and 6.8% reported they never tried drugs. Over half of those surveyed (54.8%) reported using drugs for 10 or more years. Eleven percent (10.5%) had used for 0 – 2 years, and 26.9% for between 3 and 9 years.

Methamphetamines, or meth, were cited as the number one drug of choice by respondents (48.6%), followed by cocaine (16.5%), marijuana (10.4%), alcohol (9.8%), heroin (7.3%), prescription drugs (6.4%), designer drugs (0.6%), and LSD (0.3%). When asked what other drugs respondents commonly use, responses included methamphetamines (47.7%), marijuana (44.9%), alcohol (41.8%), cocaine (34.5%), prescription drugs (22.6%), heroin (14.3%), LSD (6.6%), and designer drugs (5.6%). It is apparent in the chart below that methamphetamines are a very popular type of drug among respondents.



The survey asked respondents in what ways they paid for their drugs. Responses were as follows: Given to me (59.9%); Selling drugs (52.5%); Job

salary (49.7%); Stealing checks (27.3%); Dealing drugs for others to sell (26.1%); A sexual partner paid for them (24.5%); Retail theft (22.4%); In exchange for sex (18.0%); Manufacturing drugs (10.2%). Respondents overwhelmingly felt that most crimes are committed while under the influence of drugs, with 85.1% responding that this is the case.

## **Treatment History**

Twenty-eight percent of survey respondents (28.2%) are currently being treated for a mental health illness, and 45.4% have been treated at some point in the past while incarcerated. Over half of respondents (56.0%) have received some mental health treatment in the past while not incarcerated. Thirty-one percent (31.4%) reported they had never had a visit with a licensed mental health professional, 23.4% had 1 – 3 visits, 17.0% had 4 – 10 visits, and 28.2% had 11 or more visits.

When asked if they had ever received treatment for a drug or alcohol problem while not incarcerated, 62.9% of respondents reported that they had. Sixty percent (60.2%) have been in a residential treatment program, 58.0% have attended outpatient treatment, 15.2% have been hospitalized, and 62.1% have attended a support group or have had religious counseling. Approximately half of the respondents (51.0%) have been in a treatment program 1 – 3 times, 10.4% have been 4 – 10 times, and 2.3% have been 11 or more times.

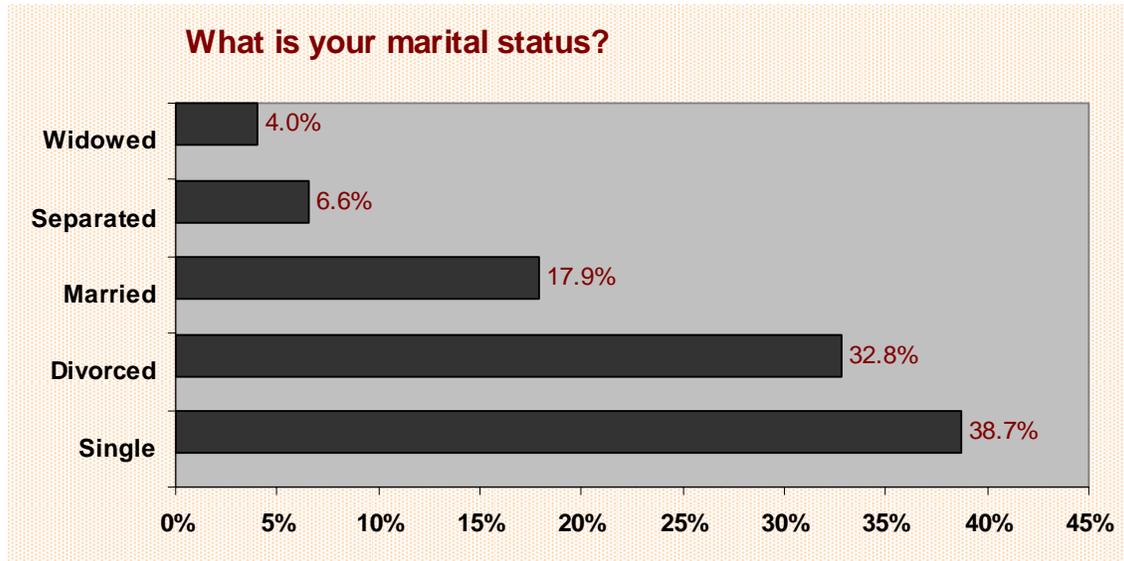
## **Family History**

Sixty percent (60.2%) of respondents reported that at least one of their parents had abused drugs or alcohol. Forty percent (39.8%) had a parent who had been to jail or prison. When asked who, 50.7% said their father, 25.0% said their mother, 24.3% said both their mother and father. Half of the respondents (50.7%) also have brothers or sisters who have been involved with the justice system.

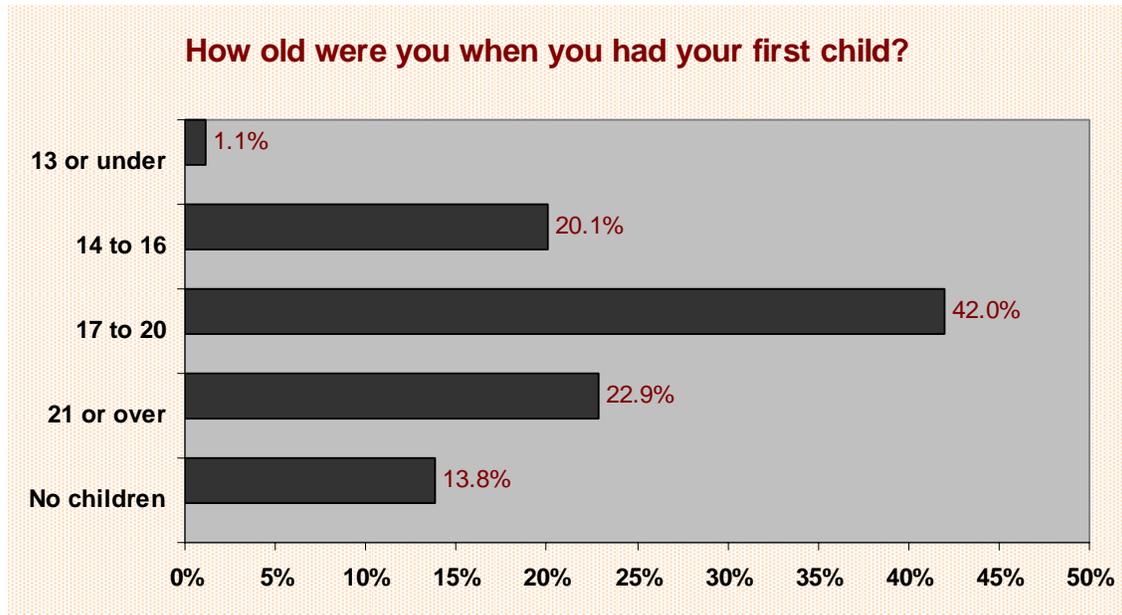
Approximately one-third of the respondents (35.4%) noted that their parents are still married. More respondents reported having a positive female role model in their life (69.4%), than a positive male role model (54.8%). Still, more respondents thought that they would benefit from having a positive female role model in their lives now (81.5%), versus a positive male role model (73.7%).

## Marriage and Children

Looking at marital status, 38.7% were single, 32.8% were divorced, 17.9% were married, 6.6% were separated, and 4.0% were widowed. A great majority of respondents were unmarried, as the chart below shows.



There were four respondents (1.1%) that had their first child when they were 13 or under, 20.1% were 14 – 16, 42.0% were 17 – 20, 17.2% were 21 – 25, and 5.7% were 26 or over. Only 13.8% never had any children. Of those that had children, 61.4% had 1 -3, 22.6% had 4 – 6, 1.4% had 7 – 9, and 0.3% had 10 or more. Almost half of those with children (45.2%) had children by more than one father. The chart on the following page shows the ages at which respondents had their first child.



Fifty-two percent (52.1%) of the mothers do not have custody of any of their children, 43.6% have custody of 1 – 3, and 4.2% have custody of between 4 and 6 children. When respondents were asked how many of their children were in the custody of the state, 87.3% responded none, 10.2% responded 1 – 3, and 2.4% responded 4 – 6. Seventy-nine percent (79.0%) of the respondents who were mothers reported they had not given up any children, 18.6% had given up 1 – 3, and 2.4% had given up 4 – 6 children. Half of the respondents with children (50.8%) noted they would be assuming responsibility for between 1 and 3 children when they were released. Slightly fewer respondents reported they would not be assuming responsibility for any children upon release, and only 6.2% reported they would be assuming responsibility for 4 – 6 children when released.

## Victimization History

When asked if anyone hit, attacked, or beat the respondents when they were under the age of 18, 63.1% responded affirmatively. Twenty-eight percent (27.9%) of the victims were beaten on two or more separate occasions, with 68.8% having been abused on 10 or more occasions. Seventy-three percent (73.2%) of the incidences went unreported to authorities. The top three reasons cited for not reporting were that the offender was a friend or family member (39.7%), fear of the offender (23.2%), and the crime was dealt with in another way (13.5%). Victims were attacked by an actual family member 44.4% of the time, by a person known to them 44.4% of the time, and by a stranger in only

11.3% of the cases. The assailant was identified as an adult by 75.9% of the victims, whereas 17.7% reported being abused by a juvenile.

When asked if anyone has hit, attacked, or beat the respondents since the age of 18, 69.9% of the respondents reported that they had. Ninety percent (90.3%) of the victims were attacked by someone they knew, and over ninety percent (93.3%) were attacked on two or more occasions. Fifty percent (50.4%) of the victims chose not to report the crime to police, and 29.5% of victims cited fear of the offender as the main reason. Another 22.5% of victims chose not to report because the offender was a friend or family member, 18.2% dealt with the crime in another way. Ninety-one percent (90.5%) of the victims identified the attacker as an adult, while only 2.8% noted the attacker was a juvenile.

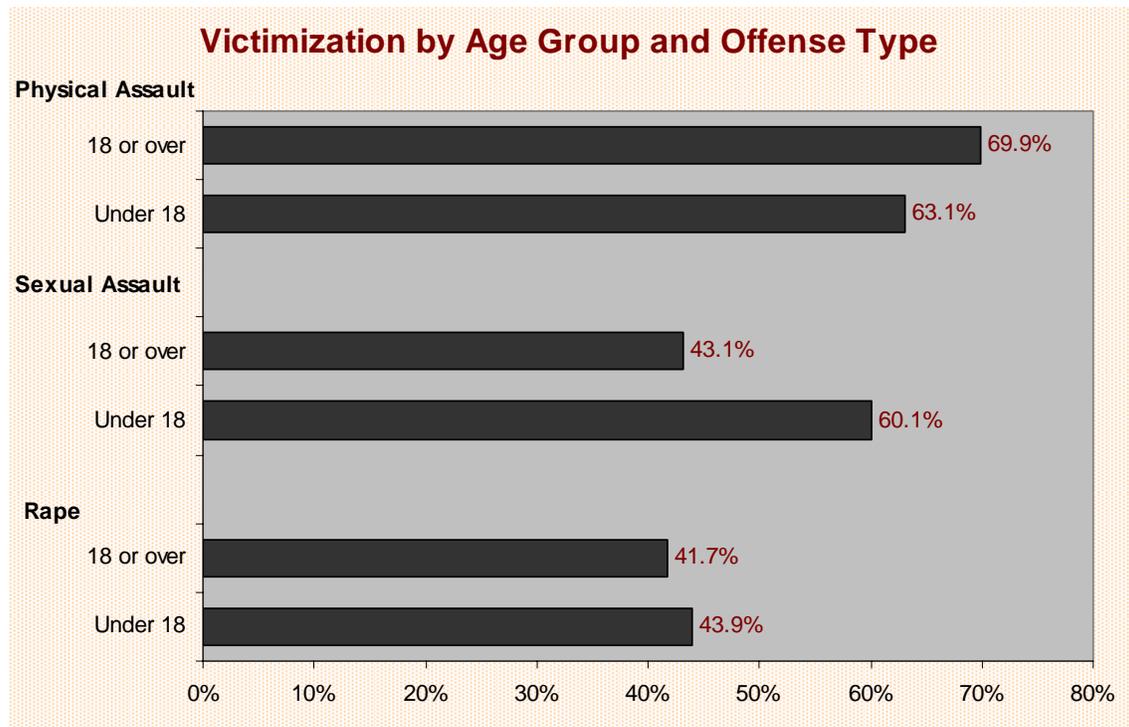
Forced, unwanted sexual activity, such as touching, grabbing, kissing, fondling, etc., occurred for 60.1% of the respondents when they were under the age of 18. This occurred on two or more occasions for 76.5% of the victims, and a majority of those sexually assaulted (80.6%) did not report one or more of the incidents to police. Victims did not report because the offender was a friend or family member (34.5%), they were afraid of the offender (26.7%), or they dealt with the crime in a different manner (12.9%). Slightly less than half of the victims (43.9%) were assaulted by someone known to them prior to the attack, while 38.1% were assaulted by an actual family member. Again, a majority of the victims suffered assaults at the hands of an adult (76.1%), rather than a juvenile (15.7%).

Since the age of 18, 43.1% of respondents have experienced forced, unwanted sexual activity, such as touching, grabbing, kissing, fondling, etc. Seventy-five percent (75.3%) have been assaulted two or more times. The overwhelming majority of victims (85.1%) declined to report one or more of the incidents to authorities. Fear of the offender was again the most common reason cited (23.8%), followed by the crime being dealt with in a different way (21.6%), and a perception that the police could not help with the situation (17.8%). Most of the victims (78.5%) knew their attacker prior to the commission of the crime, although the attacker was a stranger in 21.5% of the cases.

When questioned specifically about the crime of rape, defined as forced or attempted forced sexual intercourse, 43.9% of the survey respondents reported victimization prior to the age of 18. Of the victims of rape, 80.8% did not report the incident, or incidents to police. Forty-three percent (42.9%) of the victims reported two or more attacks, while 28.6% reported 10 or more attacks. Victims declined to report because they were afraid of the offender (31.1%), the offender was a friend or family member (25.0%), or they did not feel that the police could do anything to help (15.0%). Seventy-four percent (73.6%) of the

time, the attacker was identified as an adult, and as a juvenile 17.8% of the time.

Forty-two percent (41.7%) of the survey respondents reported experiencing a rape or attempted rape since the age of 18. This occurred on two or more separate occasions for 46.3% of the victims, and on ten or more occasions for 26.1% of the victims. Of those suffering an attack, 77.5% did not report one or more of the incidents to authorities. A family member was responsible for the attack in only 15.7% of the cases, a stranger was responsible 28.6% of the time, and the victim knew their attacker 71.4% of the time. The reasons victims did not report were as follows: Fear of the offender (28.1%); Police couldn't help (21.9%); Dealt with the crime in a different way (18.5%).



The above chart details the percentage of reported victimization by age group and offense type. Looking at lifetime prevalence of abuse, 307 respondents (85.8%) were physically and/or sexually assaulted at some point in their lives. Sixty-nine percent (69.3%), or 248 respondents, were sexually assaulted or raped during their lifetime. Seventy-nine percent (79.1%), or 283 survey respondents were physically assaulted at some point in their lives.

## Summary and Discussion

It appears that women incarcerated in Utah are facing similar issues to those of women incarcerated on a national level. Many are poorly educated and unmarried, and more than half have children that they will be assuming responsibility for once they are released from jail or prison. A majority of the women have parents who are no longer married, and parents who abused alcohol or drugs. Many of the inmates also have a parent who has been to jail or prison, and siblings who have been involved with the justice system as well.

Almost one-third of the women surveyed were being treated for a mental health illness at the time the survey was completed, and a majority had been treated for a mental health illness at some point in the past. More than half of the women have also been treated for a drug or alcohol problem in the past, with most having been through at least one treatment program. Many of the women surveyed also have a sexually transmitted disease, including HIV or hepatitis.

Many of the women inmates first tried drugs, alcohol, and cigarettes at a very young age, and a majority have been smoking and using drugs for over ten years. Overwhelmingly, methamphetamines are the preferred drug among the women. The inmates admit paying for their drugs in several different ways, including ID theft, dealing and manufacturing drugs, and in exchange for sex. Interestingly, most of the women noted that they feel most crimes are committed while under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

An alarming 85.8% of the women incarcerated in Utah report being physically or sexually assaulted at some point during their lifetime. Unfortunately, a great majority of these incidences went unreported to police. The three most common reasons cited were fear of the offender, the offender being a friend or family member, and the crime being dealt with in another manner.

The results of this survey indicate that a typical female inmate in Utah is likely to be suffering from years of abuse, as well as a long history of substance abuse. She is also likely to be a mother of more than one child. This may suggest a set of treatment needs not currently being met by Utah's correctional institutions. It is possible that a relationship exists between the inmate's history of abuse and drug use. Further research would need to be undertaken in order to investigate the nature of the relationship between these two variables. For now, treatment options that address both issues related to abuse and drug use could be examined. Psycho-educational programming specifically related to spousal abuse may also be beneficial, as many of the women reported suffering multiple physical attacks as adults. Programs targeted to addressing the needs

of incarcerated mothers and children should also be explored. These programs could focus on parenting skills, and nurturing the bonds between mother and child. Research indicates that children of incarcerated parents are at risk for a whole host of behavioral and emotional problems, so attending to the needs of these children now, may be one method of reducing future generations of offenders.

The survey results also suggest that a number of Utah's female prisoners are taking advantage of the educational opportunities available to them, such as college education, associate's degrees, and vocational training. This is a strength that should continue to be fostered in institutional program planning.